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By Katharine Q. Seelye

Members of the House and the Senate are steeped these days in the nitty-gritty of the health care debate. But for all the haggling, any bill's language is likely to be only one factor in how they vote on overhauling the nation's health care system.

That is because all members of the House and one-third of the Senate are up for re-election next year. Many will consider various political and demographic realities in their home districts and states before they cast votes, yea or nay.

A prime indicator, political analysts say, will be whether a district or state voted last year for Senator Barack Obama or for Senator John McCain for president. (Even though President Obama's approval ratings have slipped recently, they are about where they were on Election Day.)

For example, Representative Artur Davis, above, Democrat of Alabama, represents a poor district that overwhelmingly voted for Mr. Obama. But Mr. Davis is now running for governor - and the state voted overwhelmingly for Mr. McCain. Mr. Davis has criticized many aspects of a health care overhaul.

Such are the cross pressures on Democrats this year.

"It doesn't necessarily matter what's in the bill," said David N. Wasserman, who studies House races for The Cook Political Report, a nonpartisan newsletter. "What will matter is the extent to which people perceive this as 'Obamacare' and how much voters trust Obama and the Democrats."

Another factor, Mr. Wasserman said, could be the proportion of older people living in a district. People over 60 are the least likely to favor a health care overhaul and more likely than younger people to vote in a midterm election. In 2008, Mr. Obama won only 45 percent of voters over 65, compared with the 66 percent of voters he won under age 29.

Competing Forces

Other factors include whether lawmakers have already voted against the prevailing views in their districts on other controversial issues like the cap-and-trade legislation, which would limit emissions of the heat-trapping gases that cause global warming, and whether they can afford to do so again.

Then there is the matter of how much pressure (and campaign money) they have received from special interests. Insurers, drug companies and others have spent about \$2 million per day in

the last few months lobbying on health care alone, according to the Center for Responsive Politics.

Republicans appear ready to follow the pattern they set with the president's stimulus package earlier this year, when none of them in the House and just three in the Senate voted yes. Prolonged negotiations with Republicans over health care could prove just as futile. An early test will come this week, when the Senate Finance Committee votes on a bill that it finished hammering out at 2:15 a.m. Friday.

The bigger tests will come later on the House and Senate floors, where the fate of health care will probably rest with the Democrats who won in conservative or swing districts and states. In February, just seven Democrats in the House voted against the stimulus package; all but one came from districts that voted for Mr. McCain.

Possible Defections

Health care is likely to see more Democratic defections. The legislation can still pass with up to 39 defections in the House. But many fiscally conservative Democrats say the bill is too expensive, and liberals say they will not vote for a bill that lacks a government-run insurance plan.

Several freshman Democrats are particularly vulnerable, and some can be hard to read on health care.

Representative Tom Perriello of Virginia won in 2008 by just 727 votes, while his district, which includes the liberal Charlottesville, voted for Mr. McCain. It has the highest number of elderly people in the state.

In an interview, Mr. Perriello said he was undecided about health care.

"A lot of us want to get to yes, because the status quo means bankrupting this country," he said. "But that doesn't mean we're O.K. with just any reforms."

Representative John Adler, a freshman from New Jersey, was the first Democrat elected in more than a century in his district, which includes suburbs of Philadelphia. The district supported Mr. Obama. But 22 percent of the district is over the age of 60, making it one of the oldest in the country.

Mr. Adler said in an interview that the current legislation did not do enough to contain costs and that he is hypersensitive about holding down federal spending, although he voted for the stimulus package. But he is also "optimistic" that the health proposal can be improved.

Here is something else for Democrats seeking re-election to consider: There is always a drop in turnout in nonpresidential election years. Many of the young voters and African-Americans whom Mr. Obama inspired to go to the polls last year may stay home next year. And Democrats up for re-election will be on their own.

